Educational Status and its Association with Rights Awareness, Vulnerability and Support Services among Female Sex Workers

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Abstract
Educational status is an important factor influencing rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services among female sex workers (FSWs). The present study examines differences in these areas and social work intervention needs across educational categories. A quantitative, descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted in the combined Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. A sample of 375 respondents was selected from a population of 15,743 using multistage proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected through personal interviews and analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA at the 5 per cent significance level ($p < 0.05$). The findings revealed significant educational-group differences in rights awareness ($F = 10.986$), vulnerability ($F = 21.015$), access to support services ($F = 12.045$) and social work intervention ($F = 14.504$), with $p < 0.001$ in all cases. College-educated respondents recorded higher scores in rights awareness and access to support services, while illiterate respondents experienced higher vulnerability. Social work intervention scores were highest among respondents with primary education. The study concludes that educational status is significantly associated with the experiences and support needs of female sex workers. It suggests strengthening rights awareness, legal literacy, healthcare access, skill development and inclusive social work services, particularly for illiterate and less-educated women.

Keywords
Educational Status, Female Sex Workers, Rights Awareness, Vulnerability, Access to Support Services and Social Work Intervention

Introduction

Educational status is an important socio-economic factor influencing rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services among female sex workers (FSWs). Education helps women acquire knowledge about legal rights, health entitlements, personal safety and government welfare programmes. It also improves their decision-making abilities and understanding of available support mechanisms. Female sex workers frequently experience violence, economic insecurity, social stigma, discrimination and exclusion from essential services. Limited educational opportunities may restrict their ability to understand legal procedures and exercise their rights. In this context, Dandona et al. (2006) reported considerable educational disadvantages among female sex workers in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, Ganju et al. (2016) identified gaps in specific human rights knowledge among female sex workers. Mahapatra et al. (2018) highlighted the multidimensional vulnerability experienced by this population. These findings indicate that educational background may influence the knowledge and experiences of female sex workers. Therefore, examining educational status is important for understanding differences in rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services.

Educational status may also influence the ability of female sex workers to obtain healthcare, counselling, legal assistance and social welfare benefits. Women with higher educational qualifications may have better opportunities to understand service procedures and approach relevant institutions. In contrast, women with limited or no formal education may face difficulties in accessing information and claiming available benefits. Economic insecurity, discrimination and institutional barriers may further increase their vulnerability (Shannon et al., 2015; Platt et al., 2018). Ganju et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of community organisations in promoting rights awareness and supporting female sex workers. In this context, the present study examines the association between educational status and rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services among 375 female sex workers in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. It compares the mean scores across four educational categories: illiterate, primary, secondary and college education. The study also examines differences in social work intervention needs among the respondents. The

findings may help identify educational groups requiring greater attention and support. They may also provide a basis for strengthening rights awareness, reducing vulnerability and improving access to essential services through appropriate social work interventions.

Review of Literature

Educational status is an important factor influencing rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services among female sex workers. Dandona et al. (2006), in their study on the demographic and sex work characteristics of female sex workers in India, highlighted the low educational background of this population, particularly in Andhra Pradesh. Ganju et al. (2016), in a study involving 2,400 female sex workers in Andhra Pradesh, found that 83.3 per cent were aware of human rights, but many had limited knowledge of specific rights, while lack of awareness and stigma restricted their ability to claim rights. Mahapatra et al. (2018) reported that 55 per cent of female sex workers experienced multidimensional vulnerability, with financial insecurity making a major contribution. Shannon et al. (2015) explained that structural inequalities, stigma, violence and economic insecurity influence HIV risks and access to healthcare among female sex workers. Similarly, Platt et al. (2018) found that repressive policing increased exposure to violence and restricted access to health services and justice. These studies indicate that educational disadvantages, inadequate rights awareness and institutional barriers are important concerns affecting female sex workers. Therefore, examining educational differences in rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services is essential for developing appropriate empowerment-oriented social work interventions.

Objectives

1. To examine the differences in rights awareness among female sex workers based on their educational status.
2. To analyze the differences in vulnerability among female sex workers across educational categories.
3. To examine the differences in access to support services among female sex workers according to their educational status.
4. To assess the differences in social work intervention needs among female sex workers based on their educational status.

Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach with a descriptive cross-sectional research design to examine the association between educational status and rights awareness, vulnerability and access to support services among female sex workers. The study was conducted in the combined Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh, covering Madanapalle, Chittoor and Tirupati Revenue Divisions. The study population consisted of 15,743 female sex workers, from whom 375 respondents were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan method through multistage proportionate stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected through personal interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. Educational status was classified into four categories: illiterate, primary, secondary and college education. Rights awareness was assessed through knowledge of legal, health, social and welfare rights, while vulnerability covered physical, health, economic, social and legal/institutional dimensions. Access to support services included healthcare, counselling, legal assistance, financial support and welfare services. These major dimensions were measured using a five-point scale. The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences in the study variables across educational categories. The level of statistical significance was set at 5 per cent ($p < 0.05$).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on educational status-based differences among female sex workers in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. It examines differences in awareness of rights, vulnerability and access to support services across educational categories. The findings are discussed in relation to the study objectives, relevant studies and their implications for social work practice.

Awareness of Rights

Awareness of rights refers to the knowledge of female sex workers regarding their legal, social, health and welfare entitlements. In the present study, it is assessed through 12 statements covering personal safety, dignity and equal

treatment, protection from violence, healthcare, confidential health services, HIV/STI testing and treatment, police assistance, legal support, privacy, government welfare schemes and access to NGOs and social workers. Responses are measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Not Aware to 5 = Completely Aware. The study compares rights awareness among four educational categories: illiterate, primary, secondary and college-educated respondents. This comparison helps to understand how educational status is associated with knowledge of legal and social rights, awareness of available protection mechanisms and the ability to identify and approach relevant support services.

Table-1: Awareness of Rights among Female Sex Workers by Educational Status

Variables	Education Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p. value	sig
Awareness of Rights	Illiterate	62	19.74	6.4	10.986	0.000	**
	Primary	99	24.53	8.34			
	Secondary	154	27.56	12.6			
	College	60	30.27	14.64			
	Total	375	25.9	11.61			

Table-1 reveals that awareness of rights varies according to the educational status of female sex workers. College-educated respondents obtained the highest mean score (30.27), followed by secondary (27.56), primary (24.53) and illiterate respondents (19.74). The findings indicate that rights awareness increases with educational qualifications. This may be due to better knowledge, communication skills and access to information among educated respondents. The ANOVA results show a statistically significant difference among the educational groups ($F = 10.986$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is supported by Ganju et al. (2016), who identified gaps in human rights knowledge among female sex workers in Andhra Pradesh. Dandona et al. (2006) also highlighted educational disadvantages among female sex workers in India. From a social work perspective, the findings emphasized the need for legal literacy, rights awareness programmes and educational support, particularly for illiterate and less-educated women.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability refers to the risks and difficulties faced by female sex workers in their personal, health, economic, social and legal lives. In the present study, it is assessed through five dimensions comprising physical/sexual, health, economic, social and legal/institutional vulnerability, using 16 statements measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. Examining vulnerability across different educational categories helps to understand whether educational status is associated with variations in the challenges experienced by respondents. Education may influence their awareness of safety measures, healthcare, financial opportunities, social support and legal protection. The findings can help to identify the vulnerability-related needs of female sex workers and suggest suitable social work interventions.

Table-2: Vulnerability among Female Sex Workers by Educational Status

Variables	Education Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p. value	sig
Vulnerability	Illiterate	62	74.37	5.94	21.015	0.000	**
	Primary	99	63.60	13.80			
	Secondary	154	56.96	17.65			
	College	60	57.73	17.53			
	Total	375	61.71	16.46			

Table-2 reveals that vulnerability is highest among illiterate female sex workers (Mean = 74.37), followed by those with primary education (63.60), college education (57.73) and secondary education (56.96). The findings indicate that illiterate and less-educated respondents experience comparatively higher levels of vulnerability. This may be due to limited awareness of safety measures, fewer alternative employment opportunities, financial difficulties and barriers to accessing healthcare and legal assistance. The one-way ANOVA result shows a statistically significant difference in vulnerability across educational groups ($F = 21.015$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, it is indicating that educational status is significantly associated with differences in vulnerability.

The findings suggest that education may help female sex workers understand safety measures, identify available support services and access legal and healthcare facilities. Ramesh et al. (2011) reported higher experiences of violence among female sex workers with no formal education compared with those having formal education, providing relevant support for the present findings. From a social work perspective, special attention should be given to illiterate and less-educated respondents through educational programmes, livelihood support, safety awareness and improved access to healthcare and legal services.

Access to Support Services

Access to support services refers to the availability and utilization of healthcare, counselling, legal assistance, welfare and community-based services by female sex workers. In the present study, it is assessed through 12 aspects, including healthcare, HIV/STI services, counselling, NGO support, legal aid and government welfare schemes. Responses are measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. The study compares access to these services among four educational categories: illiterate, primary, secondary and college-educated respondents. This comparison helps to understand how educational status is associated with awareness, availability and utilization of support services. Education may influence respondents' ability to obtain information, communicate with service providers, understand available benefits and approach relevant institutions for assistance.

Table-3: Access to Support Services among Female Sex Workers by Educational Status

Variables	Education Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p. value	sig
Access to Support Services	Illiterate	62	24.56	4.37	12.045	0.000	**
	Primary	99	27.00	5.29			
	Secondary	154	28.97	11.16			
	College	60	34.20	12.71			
	Total	375	28.56	9.77			

Table-3 shows that access to support services is highest among college-educated female sex workers (Mean = 34.20), followed by secondary (28.97), primary (27.00) and illiterate respondents (24.56). This indicates that access to services tends to increase with educational qualifications. Education may improve awareness of available healthcare, counselling, legal assistance and welfare schemes, as well as the ability to approach service providers. The ANOVA result reveals a statistically significant difference across educational groups ($F = 12.045$, $p < 0.001$).

The finding is supported by Sharma et al. (2017), who identified significant predisposing and enabling factors associated with healthcare utilization among female sex workers in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, Punyam et al. (2012) highlighted the role of community advocacy groups in improving access to social entitlements among female sex workers. These studies support the importance of awareness and institutional support in service utilization, although they do not directly establish the same education-wise differences. From a social work perspective, awareness programmes, counselling and service-linkage support should be strengthened, particularly for illiterate and less-educated respondents.

Social Work Intervention

Social work intervention refers to professional support provided to improve the well-being, empowerment and social inclusion of female sex workers. In the present study, it covers eight aspects, including rights awareness, counselling, legal assistance, skill development, peer support, community awareness and access to government welfare schemes. These aspects are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The study examines differences in social work intervention needs among four educational categories: illiterate, primary, secondary and college-educated respondents. This comparison helps to understand how educational status is associated with the awareness and perceived need for social work support. It also helps to identify the specific intervention requirements of each educational group and plan suitable, accessible and need-based social work services.

Table-4: Social Work Intervention among Female Sex Workers by Educational Status

Variables	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p. value	sig
Social Work Intervention	Illiterate	62	25.53	9.28	14.504	0.000	**
	Primary	99	32.52	5.58			
	Secondary	154	29.76	6.99			

	College	60	31.95	5.94			
	Total	375	30.14	7.30			

Table-4 shows that the mean score of social work intervention is highest among respondents with primary education (32.52), followed by college education (31.95), secondary education (29.76) and illiterate respondents (25.53). This indicates that illiterate respondents reported comparatively lower agreement with the statements relating to social work interventions. The difference may be associated with variations in awareness of rights, knowledge of welfare schemes, understanding of available services and ability to identify their support needs. The one-way ANOVA result reveals a statistically significant difference among the educational groups ($F = 14.504$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, indicating significant educational-group differences in social work intervention scores.

From a social work perspective, the findings highlight the need to strengthen rights awareness, counselling, legal assistance, skill development and welfare-service linkage among female sex workers. Illiterate respondents may require more accessible information and direct support to understand and utilize available interventions. Ganju et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of community organisations in helping female sex workers understand and exercise their rights. Therefore, social workers, NGOs and community-based organisations should provide inclusive interventions that address the varying educational backgrounds and support needs of female sex workers.

Summary

The present study examines the association between educational status and rights awareness, vulnerability, access to support services and social work intervention among female sex workers in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh. The main objective is to analyze differences in these four areas among illiterate, primary, secondary and college-educated respondents. A quantitative approach with a descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted. From a population of 15,743 female sex workers, 375 respondents were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan method through multistage proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected through personal interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule and analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA at the 5 per cent significance level ($p < 0.05$). The findings revealed that college-educated respondents had the highest mean score for rights awareness (30.27) and access to support services (34.20), while illiterate respondents recorded the highest vulnerability score (74.37). Social work intervention scores were highest among respondents with primary education (32.52), followed by college-educated respondents (31.95). The ANOVA results showed statistically significant differences across educational groups in rights awareness ($F = 10.986$, $p < 0.001$), vulnerability ($F = 21.015$, $p < 0.001$), access to support services ($F = 12.045$, $p < 0.001$) and social work intervention ($F = 14.504$, $p < 0.001$). The findings highlight the importance of educational status in understanding the varied experiences and support needs of female sex workers and emphasize the need for inclusive, accessible and education-sensitive social work interventions.

Suggestions

- **Rights Awareness:** Need to conduct special rights awareness and legal literacy programmes for illiterate and less-educated female sex workers to improve their knowledge of legal and social rights.
- **Access to Support Services:** Strengthen access to healthcare, counselling, legal assistance and government welfare schemes through NGOs and community-based organisations.
- **Skill Development:** Promoting vocational training and alternative livelihood opportunities to reduce economic insecurity and vulnerability.
- **Accessible Awareness Programmes:** Organize awareness programmes using simple language, visual materials and other accessible communication methods to reach women with limited educational backgrounds.
- **Coordination and Social Work Support:** Strengthen coordination among social workers, NGOs and government agencies to provide inclusive, non-discriminatory and need-based support services to female sex workers across all educational groups.

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